



U.S. Department of Justice

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EVENT: Guilty Verdict

Defendant: Byron Jones,

NINETEEN DEFENDANTS CHARGED WITH DRUG TRAFFICKING

A 49 year old former resident of Detroit was found guilty today by a federal jury in Detroit on charges of conspiracy to distribute cocaine and crack cocaine and money laundering, announced United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy. Mr. Murphy was joined in the announcement by John Arvanitis, Acting Special Agent in Charge, Drug Enforcement Administration, and Maurice Aouate, Special Agent in Charge, Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation.

Found guilty was Bryon Jones. Jones is one of nineteen defendants who had been charged as a member of a large scale, long term cocaine distribution and money laundering operation involving in excess of 150 kilograms of cocaine and in over 1.5 million dollars.

Fourteen defendants have already pleaded guilty to drug, money laundering and other related charges and are currently awaiting sentencing. Two more defendants are awaiting trial and charges against two other defendants were dismissed. Those defendants who pleaded guilty include:

Riley Graham, 39, of Detroit, Michigan

Shannon Lee, 35, of Nashville, Tennessee

David Barnett, 40, of Detroit, Michigan

Dennis Williams, 55 of Detroit, Michigan

Julia Carter, 33, of California

Quianna Wasler, 26 of Washington, Pennsylvania

Ozro Graham, 32, of Detroit, Michigan

Alicia Newsome, 31, of California

Toi Horn, 34, of Maryland

Elliott Brown, 38, of Detroit, Michigan

Michael Mosley, 34, of Detroit, Michigan

Darryl James, 40, of Detroit, Michigan

Darnell Jackson, 35, of Detroit, Michigan

Kyle Stevens, 47, of Detroit, Michigan

The verdict was delivered after the jury had deliberated for approximately three hours, concluding a five-day trial held before United States District Judge Marianne O. Battani.

Evidence presented at the five-day trial and provided during the guilty pleas showed that from about 1991 through 1998, Riley Graham and his associates would travel to and from

California, Georgia, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Tennessee, Ohio and Michigan to distribute large amounts of cocaine.

The evidence revealed that the organization devised a unique way of shipping the drugs and drug proceeds across the United States in an attempt to avoid its detection by law enforcement. Initially, the defendants encased the various kilograms of cocaine, which had been compressed into hockey puck shaped packets, in wax (giving the appearance to be a large candle) and shipped it as a "special gift" with a box full of clothing to various clothing stores in the greater Detroit area that had been purchased by the organization to be used as a business front (fraudulent businesses such as clothing stores - the Nine Mile Partnership, T Clothing Company, Active Wear Company, Bonnets Men and Women's Boutique, and Barnett International Freight Forwarding Company). A majority of these "candles" of cocaine were shipped via United Parcel Service from a mail box company (The Business and Postal Center) that was purchased as a business front, by Bryon Jones, in the false name of Brian Simms, for the organization in Beverly Hills, California. As owners of this mail box company the members of the organization were able to ship these boxes without raising suspicion, could track their progress to assure they were properly delivered, and would be notified if the police intercepted them. By using the phone business "fronts", the drug organization not only concealed the interstate transfer of cocaine proceeds, they also created a false cover to make it appear that their new found wealth from drug trafficking actually came from legitimate sources.

However, once the organization learned that law enforcement had discovered the existence of the business fronts in Michigan and California, they abandoned the businesses and modified their method of operation. They then began placing the candles containing the compressed cocaine within wicker baskets with other items to give the appearance that they

were gift baskets. These gift baskets were then addressed to legitimate businesses located within a certain area in Oak Park, Michigan. Oak Park, Michigan was important because before these gift baskets were delivered to innocent businesses, United Parcel Service (UPS) employee, who had been hired by the drug organization and worked in Oak Park, would intercept the packages containing the drugs and deliver the packages to the various other members of the conspiracy located in the Greater Detroit area. These candles were not only shipped from California to Michigan, but to Tennessee, Pennsylvania and elsewhere. The drug proceeds were then shipped back in candles or wire transferred in large amounts via Western Union to and from Michigan, California, Tennessee, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Georgia and Saint Lucia, West Indies for the purpose of promoting the on-going drug distribution activities. According to witnesses involved in the drug distribution organization, Riley Graham and his associates were responsible for shipping over 100 parcels (over 100 kilograms of cocaine) from California to his business fronts in Detroit alone.

After the DEA in Detroit learned about this method of shipping the cocaine encased in candles, Riley Graham moved the hub of his drug operation to Nashville, Tennessee where he started a trucking company which he used to ship larger quantities of cocaine across the United States. The investigation likewise revealed, as part of the plan to hide his money, that Riley Graham had various members of his organization transport or wire large amounts of drug money to an associate in Saint Lucia, West Indies, in an effort to build and develop the first casino resort on the island of Saint Lucia.

"Today's guilty verdict brings to a close what was once a large scale drug trafficking organization operating in our district," stated U.S. Attorney Murphy. "The successful prosecution of this case highlights the aggressiveness which my office works to free our communities of drugs and those who traffic in them."

"Drug trafficking organizations use innovative means and any form of disguise to transport drugs and drug proceeds," stated Acting Special Agent in Charge John Arvanitis. "This organization was extremely unique in its concealment methods. This investigation successfully disrupted this organization not only in its drug trafficking capacity but also in its money laundering capabilities."

"IRS Criminal Investigation has a unique role in targeting the financial motives of drug traffickers, with the goal of permanently dismantling the drug organizations," stated SAC Aouate.

U.S. Attorney Murphy commended the cooperative efforts of the agents from the DEA and IRS along with Assistant United States Attorneys Ronald Waterstreet and Regina McCullough for their hard work and dedication to this case.

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